



**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU**  
Governor

November 30, 2021

Members of the Fiscal Committee of the General Court  
State House  
107 N. Main St.  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Honorable Members of the Fiscal Committee,

I am writing in support of the Department of Health and Human Services' requests, which are targeted to address the serious capacity challenges hospitals are facing today. As you are all well aware, New Hampshire's COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are at an all-time high. This surge is occurring at a time where there is an alarming shortage of healthcare workers. Further, the workforce that remains is exhausted and burnt out after nearly two years of being on the front lines of heroic service in the battle against COVID-19.

The increase in COVID-19 cases and staffing shortages are not only impacting hospitals but are impacting long term care facilities and community providers. When capacity in non-hospital settings decreases, that further threatens available beds in hospitals.

The Commissioner and her team at the Department worked tirelessly over the last couple of weeks, including extensive work during the Thanksgiving holiday to identify strategies to alleviate the overwhelming demands on New Hampshire hospitals. In response to the Executive Order I issued on November 23, 2021, they have arrived at what I believe to be strategic and targeted first steps designed to meet that objective.

I am sincerely hoping New Hampshire can implement all available tools to mitigate the healthcare capacity challenges through quick and decisive action by the Fiscal Committee and the Executive Council. Without your support, the State may not have the resources necessary to attack this crisis head on and the impacts of surge could get worse.

I would like to thank the Fiscal Committee for taking the first step, by scheduling a special meeting on an expedited basis, and the Executive Council for allowing these items to come before it on an expedited basis.

The items the Department prepared include:

- Allocating ARP funds to pay providers who take an individual while their Medicaid eligibility is pending approval. This will allow nursing facilities and mid-level residential care facilities to accept those individuals more quickly.

- Creating temporary acute care centers at ambulatory surgical centers and other appropriate providers.
- Pay rehabilitation centers to accept nursing home residents waiting for a bed in a long-term care facility at the rehabilitation center rate.
- Creating Strike Teams for long-term care staffing, to increase capacity at long-term care facilities that have empty unstaffed beds.

When implemented as a package, these items will assist in freeing up desperately needed hospital beds.

Critical to each requested action is the ability to move patients from hospitals as soon as other beds become available. In order to do that, the Department is seeking authority for unencumbered payments for each of the requests excluding the request for funding for the Strike Teams. (The Strike Team contract will be presented to the Executive Council as soon as it is finalized). This authority will allow providers to accept individuals immediately, providing a bed with relevant services, and then, after accepting the individual, the provider may seek payment at a set rate. In many cases, that flexibility will allow DHHS to move an individual within hours of a bed becoming available. Absent this authorization, DHHS would otherwise have to enter into individual contracts with potentially hundreds of providers. Even if contracting with individual providers for a small number of beds was administratively feasible; that approach would require weeks of processing time as opposed to hours for the Department and providers to act.

Finally, DHHS has also submitted requests to use FEMA funding to increase access to vaccination and testing sites. The benefits of these requests are two-fold. First, these services are a direct benefit to all individuals, employers, and schools across the State. Second, increasing access to these services outside of hospitals will result in a decreased need for personnel in hospitals providing those services, allowing them to be reassigned to other areas of acute care.

In sum, implementing the proposed actions in concert will have a direct and immediate impact on hospital capacity. This action cannot come fast enough, as we watch the daily case count rise, and available beds in healthcare facilities decline.

I ask that you consider this urgent request on an expedited basis in order to preserve necessary healthcare capacity in the State of New Hampshire.

Respectfully,



Christopher T. Sununu  
Governor